

THAILAND

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MEDIA MONITORING REPORT # 148

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

NCA Signatory Groups Hold Workshop

Mizzima, May 20 2016

Leaders of the eight ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) who signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) are holding a five-day political capacity building workshop at the Inya Lake Hotel in Rangoon from 18 to 22 May.



A total of 40 people from the eight EAOs, including five leaders from each EAO and representatives of other social organizations and groups have been attending the workshop.

U Khun Myint Tun, the chairman of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO), said: “We will discuss the five main topics in this political workshop. We will discuss the main topics of politics, society, security, natural resources and the environment and education. We will discuss based on

the experience gained at the previous Union Peace Conference.”

These five main topics were previously discussed by various groups at the first Union Peace Conference held on 12 January held under the previous Thein Sein led administration.

Link: <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/nca-signatory-groups-hold-workshop>

KNU and Karen Community Groups Work to Draft Ethnic Affairs Policies

Karen News, 22 May 2016

As part of its policy development intended to contribute to the peace process political negotiations, the Ethnic National Affairs Center (ENAC) held a meeting with Karen political and civil organizations to discuss about the drafted ethnic affair policies.

The meeting held on May 12 in Mae Sot was attended by representatives from the Karen National Union and community based organizations. During the meeting, the discussion was mainly based on the nine points of ethnic affairs policies drafted to support the political dialogue that is hoped will eventually lead to the emerging of a federal union.



Ko Yaw Hton, a program manager of ENAC told *Karen News* that this meeting intends to gain a common position on the drafted ethnic national affair policies.

Speaking to *Karen News*, Ko Yaw Hton said.

“This draft is based on all inclusive policy signatories and non-signatories [of NCA] to have a common position. These policies are for ethnic nationals to use in future political dialogue and to be included in the constitution.”

The draft policies were developed by the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), 12 political parties inside Burma, ethnic CBOs and CSOs in 2014.

The draft policies cover topics such as education, land ownership, natural resource, agriculture, IDPs, refugees’ affairs, humanitarian aid, levying tax and trade and investment.

At the meeting held in Mae Sot, delegates from the Karen Women Organization, Karen Youth Organization, Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People, Karen Student Network Group, Karen Human Right Group, Back Pact Health Worker Team, Burma Medical Association, Mae Tao Clinic, Karen Department of Health and Welfare, Federation of Trade Union Kawthoolei, Karen Environment and Social Action Network, Karen Education Department and Karen Refugee Committee attended and separately discussed and added to or amended the draft policies.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2016/05/knu-and-karen-community-groups-work-to-draft-ethnic-affairs-policies.html/>

‘21st Century Panglong Conference’ Set for Late July

The Irrawaddy, 20 May 2016

RANGOON — The National League for Democracy’s push for peace with ethnic armed groups is expected to begin in late July, according to sources familiar with the matter.



At the office complex of the former Myanmar Peace Center in Rangoon on Thursday, the government committee making preparations for the so-called “21st Century Panglong Conference” met with the eight non-state signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), a peace pact signed with Burma’s previous government in 2015.

“The committee explained that they would like to hold the conference by the end of July,” Khun Myint Tun, chairman of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization, told The Irrawaddy.

The framework for the conference is expected to build upon the political dialogue established by the previous government, according to NCA signatories. But, the committee will also invite 13 NCA non-signatories to work together on creating an agenda for the conference, the signatories said.

Link: <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/21st-century-panglong-conference-set-late-july.html>

UPDJC commits to success of 21st century Panglong Conference

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 29 May 2016

THE Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) pledged yesterday to hold the 21st century Panglong conference successfully, agreeing to put forward 16 representatives.

The UPDJC will be reformed with 16 representatives from the government, 16 from ethnic armed groups and 10 from political parties.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said at the first day of the meeting on Friday that the participation of political parties should be based on their representation in parliament, adding that parties that have at least one representative in a parliament will be allowed to attend the peace conference.



The 21st Century Panglong conference will be convened based on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), said State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in her capacity as chairperson of the Union-level Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) at a committee meeting yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw, adding that the UPDJC will thus remain active during the peace process.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/29_may_16_gnlm

ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT

World Bank loans to help over 5,000 villages receive electricity

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 19 May 2016

Loans from the World Bank will give the Ministry of Electricity and Energy the financial leeway to provide electricity to more than 5,000 villages across the country in two fiscal years, Deputy Chief Engineer U Thura Aung Bo said at a press conference in Nay Pyi Taw on Wednesday.

At the conference, the ministry briefed the press on its plan to connect the currently unpowered villages to the national electricity grid, with the deputy chief engineer explaining that these villages lack electricity due to their remote locations away from the power grid system.

“The villages designated are over two miles from national electricity grid systems,” U Thura Aung Bo said.

The World Bank granted a US\$300m loan to the country last December in a bid to help light rural households.

The ministry said that it would require US\$670m to implement the five-year nationwide rural electrification plan which expires in 2020.

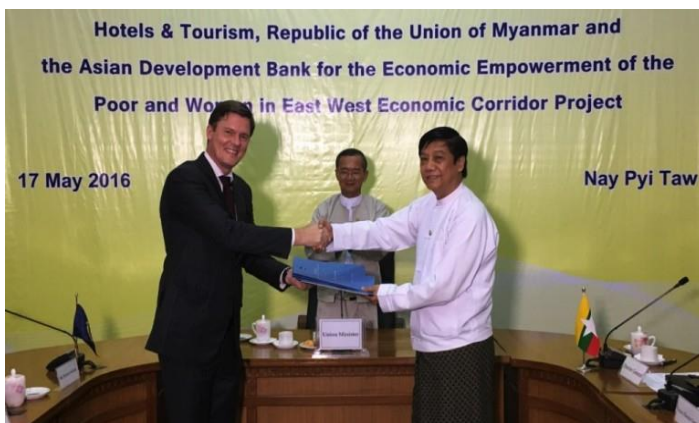
The ministry has set a goal to increase the percentage of nationwide electrification to 99 per cent by 2030.

Link: <http://globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/world-bank-loans-to-help-over-5000-villages-receive-electricity/>

ADB, Gov't inject \$3 million into Mon State tourism industry

Mon News Agency, 21 May 2016

The Asia Development Bank and the government inked an agreement for a USD \$3 million grant to revitalize tourism jobs in Mon State on Tuesday [May 17], according to the Asia Development Bank (ADB).



The signing ceremony was held in Nay Pyi Taw, the country's capital, wherein representatives from ADB and the government signed the agreement including Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Director General Tint Thwin, Ministry of Planning and Finance Permanent Secretary Maung Maung Win and ADB Country Director, Winfried Wicklein.

“This grant will support micro and small-enterprise development, resulting in increased employment and economic opportunities for the poor including women selling crafts and local food to tourists and residents in the townships of Chaungzon Island, Kyaikhto, Mawlamyine, and Mudon,” said ADB Country Director, Mr. Winfried Wicklein.

According to ADB, the grant aims to reduce household poverty through building competitive and sustainable businesses through the development of tourism-based micro and small enterprises within the state.

The \$3 million grant project will provide technical and skills-based training. The training will cover business management, finance and technology as well as identifying and accessing markets.

The now signed USD 3 million grants is from the Japan-backed Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) but is administered by ADB. In addition to this project in Mon State, the JFPR has provided grants for 16 other projects throughout the country in the areas of education, career development, finance, transport and energy.

Link: <http://monnews.org/2016/05/21/adb-govt-inject-3-million-mon-state-tourism-industry/>

Organisers Hail First Disabled Sport Competition Held in Hpa-an a Success

Karen News, 22 May 2016

For the first time, a sport event for people with disabilities was held on May 17 in Hpa-an Karen State. Organizers said the aim of the event was to encourage the community to recognize the value of people with disabilities.

Myanmar Red Cross, Australia Red Cross, and the Karen Handicap Sports Committee worked together to hold the inaugural Disabled Sport Competition in the Karen State’s capital stadium.

Nan Kyawt Kay Thi Aung, an organizer of the event and the manager of the Myanmar Prosthetic Branch Office spoke to *Karen News*.

“In Myanmar, we only have one wheelchair basketball national team. The Karen State team is the second best in Myanmar. Thus, in Karen State, for people with disabilities to play better in sports and to let them know that they can do so much even though they are disabled. We intend to encourage them.”



Organizers said that the event was a success with more than 50 people taking part in wheelchair basketball, table-tennis, badminton and cane-ball. A sport competition for children with disabilities was also held and prizes for the winners presented by Karen State’s Chief Minister, Nan Khin Htwe Myint.

The Handicap Sport Committee was established in 2014 with the objective of encouraging disabled children in Karen State to play sport.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2016/05/organisers-hail-first-disabled-sport-competition-held-in-hpa-an-a-success.html/>

FDB increases credit limit to Thaton farmers

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 30 May 2016

FARMERS in Mon State’s Thaton district are to be issued with K2,500 million in credit by the district Farmers Development Bank (FDB) to cover expenses involved in planting monsoon paddy, the bank has made it known.

The issuing of monsoon paddy credit within Thaton district began on 19 May, with the majority of farmers requesting loans for up to ten acres worth of paddy. Credit will continue to be issued until the end of June, it is

known.

In terms of the repayment of credit, farmers will be able to start making repayments from the harvesting of paddy in January 2017 until the deadline set by the bank of the end of March.

"We'll be okay this year as they've issued us with a loan of K150,000 per acre. Now we just need no irregular weather fronts. The increase in interest rate from five to eight percent though isn't great. But, it's still much cheaper than rates offered by private lenders," said U Saw Thein, a farmer from Thaton township.

The four townships that make up Thaton district comprise approximately 21,000 farmers, who tend to roughly 171,000 acres of farmland, for whom a total of K2,569 million of credit will be handed out. In terms of farmers within Mon State as a whole, over K4,000 million of credit will be issued, it has been learned.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/30_may_16_gnlm

State government giving ID and household document within the day in Karen state

KIC, 26 May 2016

U San Shwe, Deputy Director of Kayin State immigration and population department told KIC on May 25 that the state government is providing a field service to issue national identity (ID) card and household documents to its population in the seven townships, in accordance with the government's 100-day plan for the community.



"It's the about the government's 100-day plan. Our department is working together with NCR groups to issue ID cards and household documents to the villagers based on the population and household information provided to us by village tract administrators. We conduct blood test, fill out information and issue documents, all done within one day time" U San Shwe said.

The services provided include the issuance of ID card for 10-year olds and 18-year olds, birth and death household document update, and temporary household registration document for those who

moved out, according to the state immigration and population department.

Ko Naing Tun, from Kawlamu village of Hpa-an township told KIC, "The authority came to make ID card for the villagers. The people are required to fill in forms and charts. I heard that they did it within one day so I came and it's really efficient. Making ID card was not that easy in the past. Now they came to the village to do it for the people."

The exercise is carried out in accordance with 100-day plan in all localities. Those who want to obtain the ID card only need to contact their village administrators. Having the ID card and household registration makes it easier to travel or do business, said Daw Nyo Nyo Tun who is the deputy head of immigration.

Based on the lists submitted to the immigration by village administrators from townships in Kayin, including villages from west of the Salween, the immigration will send out their staff to the field to provide services free of charge.

This exercise is free of charge and will be conducted from 1 May to 30 July, according to the immigration head.

(Unofficial translated by IMU – Mae Sot)

Link: <http://kicnews.org/2016/05/%E1%80%9B%E1%80%80%E1%80%B9-%E1%81%81%E1%81%80%E1%81%80%E1%80%85%E1%80%AE%E1%80%99%E1%80%B6%E1%80%81%E1%80%BA%E1%80%80%E1%80%B9%E1%80%BB%E1%80%96%E1%80%84%E1%80%B9%E1%80%B7-%E1%80%BB%E1%80%95%E1%80%8A/>

Myanmar Government to Let Blacklisted Democracy Activists Return from Exile

Radio Free Asia, 26 May 2016

The Myanmar government will allow exiled opposition activists who are still on an official “no-entry” blacklist to return to the Southeast Asian country within 100 days, said deputy foreign affairs minister Kyaw Tin on Thursday.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working on granting full rights and protections to those who return, the same as they have received in the countries where they have been living, as well as remove their names from the country’s immigration blacklist, Kyaw Tin said.

Thousands of Myanmar students, former political prisoners, and war refugees who fled the country as far back as the 1988 pro-democracy protests, which led to a military crackdown and international isolation, reside abroad primarily in the United States, Europe, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore and Japan.



Naing Aung, who had been living in Thailand, returned to Myanmar briefly in August 2012 after he was removed from the blacklist of potential state enemies under former President Thein Sein. He had tried back then to persuade the government to extend the reprieve to all exiled dissidents.

“We are trying to return home because we want to work with the new democratic government led by Aung San Suu Kyi,” he told RFA’s Myanmar Service. “It would not be a bad idea to let people who have been working on democracy and human rights since 1988 return home.”

Link: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-government-to-let-blacklisted-democracy-activists-return-from-exile-05262016150955.html>

‘Peace Park’ intends to turn battlefield into refuge

Mizzima, 28 May 2016

The Salween Peace Park in Myanmar’s Kayin State aims to turn a former battlefield into a national park where wildlife will be protected.



This was the stated intent as 300 local leaders, ethnic soldiers and activists gathered May 23-26 for a consultation in the remote mountainous corner of Mutraw in Kayin or Karen state.

Mutraw, also known as Papun, is a heavily forested area along the border between Burma and Thailand. Through this land flows the Salween River, the longest undammed river in East Asia and the refuge of some of Asia’s last indigenous peoples and endangered

species. It is also the home to the longest running civil war on Earth, now in its fourth year of a fragile ceasefire.

The concept of a peace park is not new to the world, with more than 180 established globally. The idea combines universal aspirations: to end and avoid violent conflict; to protect the environment; to ensure the preservation of ethnic cultural resources; and to help post-conflict communities recover and rebuild. But according to research of peace parks commissioned by KESAN, the Salween Peace Park would be the only one of its kind. Most peace parks include one or two of the four objectives. What makes the Salween Peace Park unique, according to KESAN, is that it would be the only peace park in the world to include all four aims.

This historic consultation for the Salween Peace Park resulted in the creation of a council of elders, a secretariat and a steering committee, which will together draft a charter for the Peace Park and continue consultations with communities throughout 2016. The next consultation will be held in December 2016.

Link: <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/%E2%80%98peace-park%E2%80%99-intends-turn-battlefield-refuge>

Over K170 million injected into Southern Myanmar's rural infrastructure

Myintmakha News Agency, 17 May 2016

A budget of K170.5 million has been allocated for repairs and maintenance to improving the quality of rural roads and bridges in Myanmar's southern Tanintharyi Region as part of the new government's one hundred day project initiative, according to the regional Department of Rural Development.

"We'll carry out completion of paving roads and repairing bridges, to those which require it, in rural areas as part of the new government's hundred day initiative. A list has been compiled of road and bridges in villages of respective townships that are to be given first priority. Efforts will also be made as part of the same initiative to build township level offices for the department." explained U Thet Paing, head of the Department of Rural Development for Tanintharyi Region.

The aforementioned budget has been divided throughout the region via districts: K113.4 million will be used for four townships of Dawei district; K43.7 million for four townships of Myeik district; and K13.3 million for two townships of the region's southern Kawthaung district.

A total budget of K3, 211.9 million has been permitted for use throughout districts of Tanintharyi Region during this 2016-17 fiscal year for road, bridge and water availability initiatives.

Link: <http://www.myitmakhamedia.info/over-k170-million-injected-into-southern-myanmars-rural-infrastructure/>

LAND AND PROPERTY

The fight for resources in Myanmar's deep south

Myanmar Times, 25 May 2016

Tanintharyi Region, the southern tip of Myanmar, abounds with natural resources and the problems associated with them.

Residents in the isolated region face over-mining by foreign companies, the proposed development of a deep-sea port, an oil refinery and a special economic zone, mechanized farming of rubber and palm oil, an illegal trade in timber, overfishing, migration, and coal-fired power plants.

Tanintharyi is not connected to the national grid –



residents and civil society groups have occasionally protested after being forced to pay up to K600 for one unit of electricity, which costs K50 in Yangon.

On average, power in Tanintharyi costs K300 per unit, and will only become cheaper if the national grid is extended. The alternative is to buy gas from Thailand.

Not too far from the refinery, a massive international development is being planned. The Dawei special economic zone will cover 27 square kilometers in its first phase, rising to an eventual 204.5 sq. km, according to local activists.

Following the relocation of six villages, nearly K243 billion has been spent on compensating residents for the 12,000 hectares of community land included in the zone, though disputes over the amount of compensation and the quality of the land to which former owners have been relocated rumble on.

“Any kind of investment has to take the effects on the local community carefully into account. With this SEZ, the compensation has not been managed systematically. If you relocate someone, you have to create a livelihood there, or how will they survive?” said Daw Lae Lae Maw, adding that Thai companies had shown a different attitude to the problems raised.

Link: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/business/20493-the-fight-for-resources-in-myanmar-s-deep-south.html>

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